

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 04796 211640Z

42

ACTION INR-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SAM-01 SSM-03 PM-04

NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 PRS-01 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 SCCT-01

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P R 211604Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8765

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

DIA WASHDC

S E C R E T MOSCOW 4796

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, UR

SUBJECT: ALLEGATIONS OF SOVIET PRESSURE ON ASAD TO MODIFY HIS
POLICY ON LEBANON

1. SUMMARY:

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF REPORTS CIRCULATING IN
DAMASCUS ABOUT THE NATURE OF RECENT SOVIET PRESSURES ON
SYRIA TO MODIFY ITS POLICY IN LEBANON. THE LEAST CREDIBLE
VERSION ON ITS SURFACE IS A TEXT CARRIED BY LE MONDE
PURPORTING TO BE A LETTER FROM BREZHNEV TO ASAD FILLED
WITH VERY HEAVY-HANDED THREATS. REQUEST ANALYSIS
OF "BREZHNEV TEXT" TO DETERMINE ITS AUTHENTICITY. END
SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF TALKED JULY 20 WITH DR. GHASSAN RIFAI, EDITOR
OF TICHRIIN NEWSPAPER, ABOUT REPORTS OF SOVIET PRESSURES
ON ASAD REGIME TO MODIFY ITS POLICY IN LEBANON. ACCORDING
TO RIFAI, SOVIET AMBASSADOR MET RECENTLY WITH ASAD AND
RAISED FOLLOWING POINTS:

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 04796 211640Z

(A) WHAT IS POST-RIYADH SYRIAN POSITION ON SINAI ACCORD?

(B) DOES SYRIA HAVE SOME UNDERSTANDING WITH USG REGARDING LEBANON, AND IF SO, WHAT ARE DETAILS?

(C) WHAT ARE SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON?

(D) SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON IS OPPOSED BY ALL COMMUNIST AND SOCIALIST REGIMES AND PARTIES WITH SOLE EXCEPTION OF COMMUNIST PARTY OF SYRIA -- HOW DOES SYRIA JUSTIFY ITS ACTIONS THERE?

RIFAI ADDED SOVIETS HAVE INFORMED SYRIANS THAT USSR PLANS SUPPORT PALESTINIANS MORE OPENLY IN LEBANON. PREVIOUSLY, SOVIET SHIPS CARRYING PROVISIONS FOR PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON HAVE NOT SHOWN RUSSIAN FLAG; IN FUTURE THEY INTEND TO DO SO AND WANT NO PROBLEMS WITH SYRIAN ATTEMPTS TO ENFORCE SEA BLOCKADE.

3. MFA AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR SHOEFI TOLD ANOTHER EMBOFF JULY 21 HE THOUGHT THAT SOVIETS COULD HAVE OVERLOOKED SYRIAN ATTACKS AGAINST PALESTINIANS AND JUMBLATT FORCES IN LEBANON HAD DAMASCUS SECURED QUICK VICTORY; EFFECTIVE LEFTIST RESISTANCE, HOWEVER, FORCED SYRIA TO ALTER ITS POLICY OF SEEKING SPEEDY MILITARY RESOLUTION AND SYRIA INSTITUTED POLICY OF SLOW STRANGULATION THROUGH BLOCKADE AND MILITARY PRESSURE. DELAY PERMITTED LEFTISTS TO PRESSURE SOVIETS INTO CORNER; SOVIETS FINALLY FELT COMPELLED TO UNDERTAKE INCREASINGLY GREATER MEASURES TO SUPPORT THEIR LEFTIST/PALESTINAIN ALLIES.

4. SHOEFI SAID HE RECENTLY TALKED WITH MILITARY OFFICER ABOUT QUESTION OF NOTE FROM BREZHNEV TO ASAD. OFFICER TOLD SHOEFI THAT AROUND JULY 14 HE HAD RECEIVED TELEPHONE CALL FROM ASAD AND DURING ENSUING CONVERSATION ASKED PRESIDENT WHETHER RUMORS TRUE ABOUT HIS RECEIPT OF TOUGH SOVIET MESSAGE. ACCORDING TO SHOEFI, ASAD DENIED VERACITY OF RUMORS. NONETHELESS, SHOEFI SAID HE BELIEVED SOVIETS WERE PRESSURING SARG TO CHANGE COURSE IN

SECRET

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 04796 211640Z

LEBANON AND COME TO TERMS WITH LEFTISTS. HE SAID SOVIETS HAD ANALYZED SYRIAN PREDICAMENT AND HAD CONCLUDED THAT ASAD COULD OBTAIN NOTHERIN TANGIBLE FROM U.S.; THIS, IN EFFECT, LEFT ASAD WITH NO AMERICAN OPTIMM SOVIETS FELT THAT WHILE ASAD MAY EVINCE INITIAL IRRITATION AT SOVIET PRESSURES, HE WAS IN A CORNER AS WELL AND WOULD EVENTUALLY HAVE NO RECOURSE BUT TO ACCOMMODATE HIMSELF TO SOVIETS, HE SAID SOVIETS HOPED ASAD WOULD EVENTUALLY

REALIZE SOVIETS HAD BEEN TRYING TO HELP HIM WITH "FRIENDLY
ADVICE."

5. FOR INR. ACTION REQUESTED: SHOUFFI'S ANALYSIS APPEARS
CONSISTENT WITH RIFAI'S REMARKS; THEY SEEM TO ENCOMPASS
POINTS THAT BOTHER SOVIETS AND HAVE RING OF TRUTH.
SHOUFFI'S ASSERTION THAT ASAD CLAIMED NOT TO HAVE RECEIVED
BREZHNEV NOTE ADDS TO MY SUSPICIONS ABOUT AUTHENTICITY OF
LE MONDE ARTICLE CONTAINING TEXT OF ALLEGED NOTE FROM
SOVIET LEADER . (CARRIED BY FBIS). IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE
SOVIETS EMPLOYING
QUITE SO BLUNT AN INSTRUMENT AFTER ALL THEIR EXPERIENCE IN
THIS REGION. I WOULD APPRECIATE A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF
THE LE MONDE TEXT TO DETERMINE TO BEST POSSIBLE EXTENT
ITS AUTHENTICITY.
MURPHY

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